GENDER PARITY IN ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP IN SELECTED SOUTHERN AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS AND REFLECTION.

Norman Rudhumbu[*]

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to analyse and explain gender representation in academic leadership positions in selected universities in Southern Africa as well as to test how far the representation compares with global figures on gender representation in academic leadership positions. The study focused on leadership in faculties and departments only. Content analysis was used as the sole data collection method. Results of the study showed that there is very little if any, effort being put by universities to ensure gender parity in academic leadership positions. Most of the participating universities showed widening gaps between gender in terms of representation in academic leadership. Only one university (the University of Mauritius) has managed to turn around gender representation in academic leadership positions with specific reference to HOD positions where the university has more female HODs than male HODs. It is recommended that universities still need to do more than what is currently obtaining, to attract females into leadership positions.

Key words: Leadership, gender, academic position, university, gender parity, representation

[*] **Botho University, Gaborone, Botswana**

Introduction

Women absence in academic leadership in higher education (HE) positions has become a recurrent theme in literature (Bagilhole & White, 2011; Rab, 2010). Literature shows that the recruitment of women into higher education now exceeds that of men and has increased six fold over the last forty years (Morley, 2013; Poudel,2013). Studies also show that the advent of gender equality legislation and policy initiatives, changes in socio-economic gender relations, as well as the expansion of HE opportunities globally, have all in their own unique ways, contributed to the increase in the number of female students accessing HE and hence in the increase of females entering HE employment (Leathwood & Read, 2009; Morley, 2011). Studies further show that on a global scale, the number of female students enrolling into universities has doubled that of male students, showing the number of female students enrolled in universities rising from 10.8 million in 1970 to 77.4 million in 2008 (UNESCO, 2010). Despite the above staggering statistics, most academic positions in HE continue to remain in the hands of men (Blandford, Brill, Neave & Roberts, 2011; Singh, 2008). Such a lack of women representation in senior academic positions means that women are globally underrepresented across all academic decision-making fora that include academic committees, boards, recruitment panels and the management executive (Elg & Jonnergard, 2010; Blandford et al, 2011). This has led to a significant component of skill and expertise not being utilised in HE (Patricia,Flynn, Cavanagh&Bilimoria, 2015; Rab, 2010). Such results help to confirm earlier studies such as the one carried out by Whitaker and Lane (1999) that showed that gender, more than age, experience, educational level, background of competence, determines the role an individual is assigned in HE.

Literature review

Literature shows that women continue to be marginalized with regards to academic leadership in higher education. In a study by Rice (2015), it was shown that some of the reasons why women mobility into leadership positions in HE is either frustrated or slow include organisational constraints, differential effects of work and family demands, explicit and implicit biases against women, and underrepresentation of women in academic leadership and decision making positions. Morley (2011) also argues that one reason, she believes, for this gender imbalance is that the entrenched patriarchal power nexus at universities, with their male-dominated

departments, interview boards and academic journal editors, is self-perpetuating. This makes it more difficult for women to attain the critical acclaim and academic capital that might lead to full-time positions, or sabbaticals to further their work. The above reasons are also confirmed by a study by the Hill, Corbett & Rose(2013). Morley (2013) in her study on gender imbalance in HE also showed that there are many structures of inequality in HE that militate against entry of women into academic leadership positions and also that for those women who happen to penetrate the structures, they face many challenges.In her other study on gender and misrecognition, Morley (2013) highlighted the way in which society offers demeaning, confining or inaccurate readings (assessments) of the value particular groups or individuals with regards to what it means to be managerial. Basing her analysis on Eagley &Karau (2002)'s two forms of prejudice against women rate women as less capable of taking leadership when compared to men, and less favourable in terms of their behaviour and general nature, Morley (2013) was able to show that how the leadership role in HE is construed and constructed is a critical predictor of the patterns of the selection process in so far as particular qualities of management are normalized and prioritised. Such prejudice according to Gronn and Lacey (2006) has led the dominant group (men) in higher education cloning itself and appointing others in terms of its own image as a way of minimizing what is referred to as *management risk*in academic departments.

In their study of the management–masculinity dualism, Binns and Kerfoot (2011) showed that leadership in HE more often than not, is all too frequently defined in terms of normative masculinity with femaleness being portrayed as negative and maleness as a resource or a form of capital, leading to further prejudices against women. As a result, productivity, competitiveness, assertiveness, authority, strategy, effectiveness are viewed as a masculine domain (Fitzgerald, 2011) with femininity being taken as irreconcilable with intellectual and managerial authority (Morley, 2010; Smit, 2006; Winchester & Browning, 2015). According to Morley (2011), academia is characterised as being cutting-edge, innovative and hypermodern, yet wherever you look it is underpinned by the archaism of male domination. Due to these deep-rooted misrecognitions and biases against women, women in HE are viewed as *organisational others* and will have to manage this *otherness* in order to succeed in their leadership roles (Probert, 2005; Batool, Sajid& Shaheen, 2013). To further demonstrate the depth and breadth of prejudice

against women in HE academic leadership in major European countries, Pinheiro, Geshwind, Hansen and Pekkola (2015) in their study showed that percentages of women in academic leadership were as follows: Finland (25%), Sweden (30%), Norway (33%) and Denmark (21%). This statistics matches results of another study conducted by Tiffani (2012) in USA which showed that the percentage of women academic leaders in the USA universities is around 35.9% while in UK it is 34.6%, Australia 18%, and the Arab States have the second lowest with 14.0%and Japan sits at the lowest with 12.7%. Among European countries, Turkey is the closest to achieving gender parity in academic leadership in university with a 47.5% of its women being in academic positions (Grove, 2013). A study by Hein, Horvat, Steiger and Connix that targeted 46 European universities of science and technology, found that women academic leaders constituted around 15% of the total academic leadership in the universities. Globally, women constitute 26% of academic leadership positions, an increase of 160% from the 10% of 1986 (Catalyst, 2015).

Growe and Montgomery (1999) identified three models that can be used to explain why there is such prejudice against women in life in general and in HE in particular. The three models are the meritocracy or the individual perspective model, the organisational or discrimination model, and the woman's place or the social perspective model.

The meritocracy or individual perspective model
This model according to Chliwniak (1997) represents a psychological orientation. By looking at the personal traits, characteristics, abilities or individual attitudes such as self-image, confidence and aspiration, this model premised on the belief that women are not assertive enough, do not have power, lack self-confidence, do not aspire for hire office, are unwilling to play the game (to compete with men for positions) and do not apply for positions until they feel they are qualified enough. While they are procrastinating, Tallerico and Burstyn (1996) say that men will be filling the positions. Authorities such as Conner (1992) who argues against this model indicated that on the contrary, women unlike men, perceive power not as of pushing people around but rather as an instrument for empowering others and also that women do not take power of position as finite but rather as something that expands as it gets shared. If therefore women do not see the position they may seeking to apply for as one that gives them power to empower others, they

would not apply for the position. With regards to promotion of women thorough merit, Bagilhole and White (2011) argued that women lack mentoring in leadership skills for them to be able to effectively compete against men for academic positions.

The organisational or discrimination model

It is a model that focuses on the educational systems and which argues that institutional structures and practices discriminate against women (Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996;Chanana,2013; Misra, Lundquist, Holmes& Agiomavritis, 2011). According to this model, these structures and practices favour men to advance in academic leadership more smoothly and swiftly than women. HE institutions are viewed as patriarchal in nature and hence quite unfriendly and unaccommodating to women (Mishra, 2013; Banerjee & Polite, 2011). Besides having structures that are unfavourable to women, organisations such as HE institutions are viewed as being political arenas where one has to lobby to attract attention and to be able to construct a highly visible profile to be able to be recognised as a leader of choice (Grove, 2013; Jarboe, 2013; Batool & Sajid, 2013). Studies show that not many women are prepared or even interested to play these political games hence not many will apply for academic leadership. Further articulating how organisational structures and practices frustrate women advancement in leadership positions in academic departments, Women Watch (2007) argues that although a lot of women have high qualifications, the institutions prefer to select men in higher positions, hence one can hardly find a womanbecoming a dean for any faculty, and if she did become dean, they would not let her workin peace, a phenomenon, sometimes referred to as the "sticky floor" syndrome, which doesnot allow women to move upwards in their careers.

The woman's place or the social perspective model

The model asserts that cultural and social norms in society encourage discriminatory practices to thrive at the workplace (Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996; Chanana,2012;Schiebinger, Londa & Gilmartin, 2010; Poudel, 2013). It argues that the socialisation patterns that channel women and men into different role confinements are some of the major causes of eventual biases against women. This model is further articulated in modern literature through the works of Morley and Crossouard (2015), Altbach (2013) and Ahmed-Ghosh (2013) who all cited the role of cultural and social values in perpetuating discrimination against women. The above is also supported in

the works of Morley and Crossouard (2015) also indicated that society has potent messages of what is considered gender appropriate behaviour and role and such messages define what role women are acculturated to play and not to play in life and this according to Morley (2014) makes it difficult for women to navigate the institutional structures when seeking promotion into leadership positions in HE. Morley (2011) also argues that there is a cultural climate that favours men in HE and that women are not recognised for their talents or abilities and are often forced to do low-level, high-volume administrative work, while many more men assume external-facing roles that have immediate…career gains. The above is further highlighted by Piterman (2008) who argued that a deep level of cultural resistance to female authority excludes an authentic female presence.

The above three models can be summarised as shown in Table 1

Table 1: Gender-based models

Model	Emphasis	Cause
Meritocracy Model	Psychological orientation	Women are looked to as the cause
Organisational Model	Educational system	The organisational structures and practices of education which discriminate against women
Women's place model	Cultural and social norms	Different socialisation patterns for men and women

Source: Growe and Montgomery (1999: 13)

Methodology

This study was exploratory in nature and used document analysis as the main source of collecting data. The population of the study were the 49 public universities in the five selected countries in Southern Africa. Countries whose universities formed the sample of the study were selected from the 15 countries using simple random sampling strategy. All the names of the 15 countries in Southern Africa were put in a hat and then drawn out randomly until 5 countries were drawn. 6 universities from the 5 countries were selected. Convenience sampling was used to select the 6 universities from the 5 countries to participate in the study. In the convenience sampling procedure, the major universities of the selected countries were targeted as they were among the largest in those countries. Since South Africa had the highest number of universities among the countries selected for the study, two universities were selected from that country

while one university was selected from the other four countries. Another criterion used for choosing the participating universities was availability of the required data (data on gender balance in academic departments). Academic department positions that were targeted in terms of whether they were led by a woman or a man were the Dean of faculty and Head of department positions.Results of the document analysis were presented in a table and graphs. Faculties including centers ranged from 8 to12 per institution while departments ranged from 63 to 80 per institution.

Results

Table 2: Academic Leadership and gender distribution in selected universities

University	Dean position and gender distribution (Year 2015)		HOD position and gender distribution (Year 2015)	
	Male %	Female %	Male %	Female %
University of Zimbabwe	75	25	75	25
University of Namibia	65.2	34.8	65.2	34.8
University of South Africa	64.9	35.1	64.9	35.1
University of Zambia	81	19	81	19
Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University	59.4	40.1	59.4	40.1
University of Mauritius	46.2	53.8	46.2	53.8

Sources: www.uz.ac.zw; www.unisa.ac.za; www.unam.edu.na; www.unza.zm; www.nmmu.ac.za; www.uom.ac.mu

Table 3: Distribution of deans of faculty by gender

University	Male %	Female %
University of Zimbabwe	75	25
University of Namibia	65.2	34.8
University of South Africa	64.9	35.1
University of Zambia	81	19
Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University	59.4	40.1
University of Mauritius	46.2	53.8

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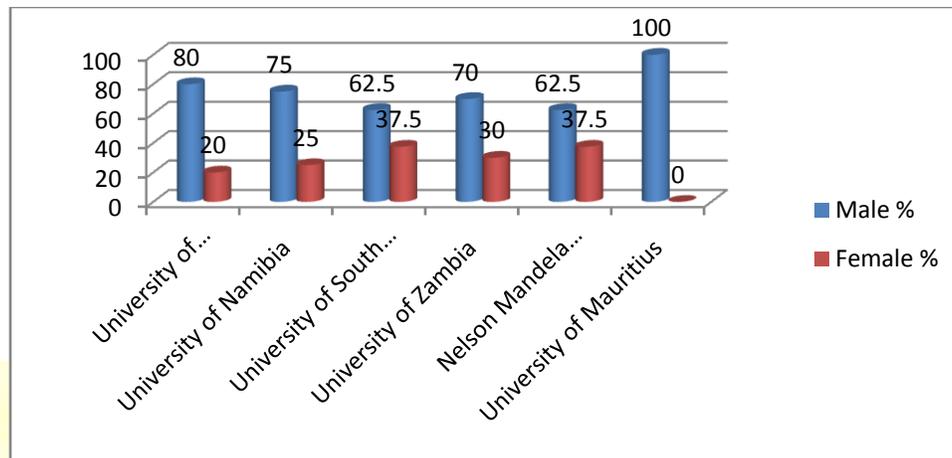http://www.ijmra.us

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Figure 1: Distribution of deans of faculties by gender

Results shown in Table 3 as well as in Figure 1, show that there is a big gender gap in the promotion of men and women to the positions of deans of faculty. At the University of Zimbabwe, male deans of faculty constitute 80% of all deans while female deans constitute 20%. At the two South African universities namely the University of South Africa and Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, male deans constitute 62.5% of all the deans while female deans constitute 37.5% of all the deans in the institutions. At the University of Namibia, male deans constitute 75% of all the institutional academic deans while female deans constitute 25%. At the University of Zambia, male deans constitute 70% of all institutional academic deans while female deans constitute 30%. Finally at the University of Mauritius, male deans constitute 100% meaning that no faculty is led by a female member at dean level at the institution. On average therefore the ratio of male to female deans in the six universities is 75 to 25 which is still below the global ratio of 74 to 26of female academics in leadership positions. This means that for every 100 deans of faculty, there will be 75 male and 25 female deans and this shows that universities are still not capable or not willing to attract female academics into leadership positions.

Table 4: Distribution of heads of department by gender

Universities	Male %	Female %
University of Zimbabwe	80	20
University of Namibia	75	25
University of South Africa	62.5	37.5
University of Zambia	70	30
Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University	62.5	37.5
University of Mauritius	100	0

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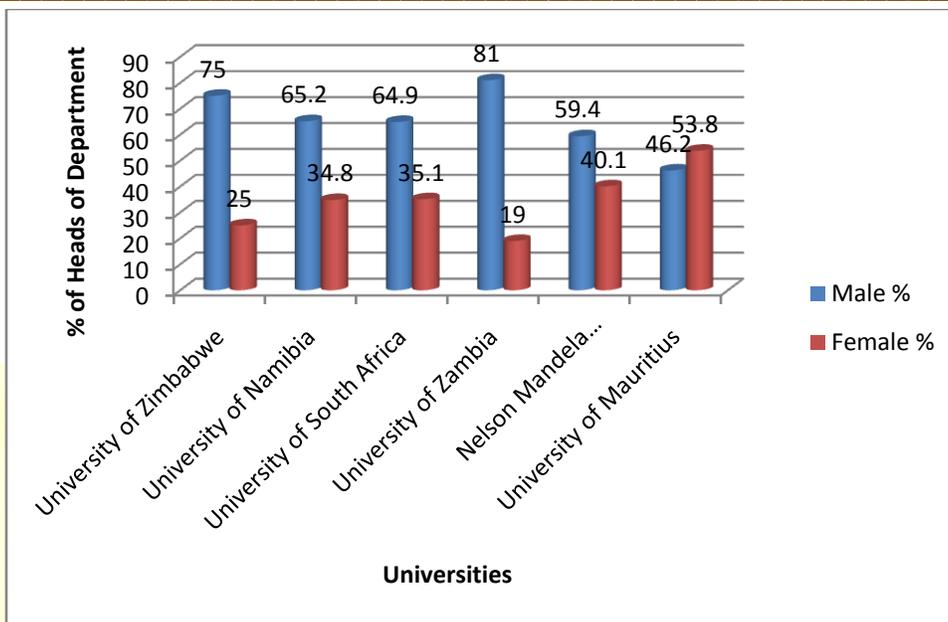http://www.ijmra.us

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Figure 2: Distribution of heads of department by gender

Results in Table 4 as well as in Figure 2 show that males dominate females in the leadership of academic departments in the six universities that participated in the study. At the University of Zimbabwe, the ratio of male to female HODs is 75 to 25, University of Namibia (65.2 to 34.8), University of South Africa (64.9 to 35.1), University of Zambia (81 to 19), Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (59.4 to 40.6) and at the University of Mauritius (46.2 to 53.8). The above results show that male HODs mostly dominate HOD positions in most of the universities except at the University of Mauritius where there are more female HODs than male HODs. From the above results it can be seen that the University of Zambia has the largest gender gap when it comes to gender balance in the head of department position while the University of Mauritius has managed to turn around the gender gap and now has more females in the head of department position than males. Overall, the ratio of male HODs to female HODs is 65.3 to 34.7 which is above the global ratio of between 74 to 26 females who are in academic leadership positions. This again shows that universities are still not doing enough to attract female academics to leadership positions and bridge the gender gap and ensure gender parity.

Discussion of findings

While women representation at HOD level is 34.7% and is above the global figure of 26%, it is women representation in dean positions in HE institutions that is still very low. While the global

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percentage of female deans in universities is 26%, in the selected universities in southern Africa the percentage is at 25%. This shows that universities in Africa are not doing enough to ensure gender parity in leadership positions in HE. Such results confirm assertions by a number of authorities who argue that HE institutions are still wallowing under a cultural climate that favours men in HE and thathave women not being recognised for their talents or abilities and are often forced to do low-level, high-volume administrative work, while many more men assume external-facing roles that have immediate…career gains (Morley, 2011). This is also confirmed by Piterman (2008) who argued that a deep level of cultural resistance to female authority in HE excludes an authentic female presence in leadership positions.

In their study of the management–masculinity dualism, Binns and Kerfoot (2011) showed that leadership in HE more often than not, is all too frequently defined in terms of normative masculinity with femaleness being portrayed as negative and maleness as a resource or a form of capital, leading to further prejudices against women. As a result, productivity, competitiveness, assertiveness, authority, strategy, effectiveness are viewed as a masculine domain (Fitzgerald, 2011) with femininity being taken as irreconcilable with intellectual and managerial authority and hence being deliberately excluded from leadership positions (Smit, 2006; Winchester & Browning, 2015). A number of studies show that such a lack of women representation in senior academic positions means that women are globally underrepresented across all academic decision-making fora that include academic committees, boards, recruitment panels and the management executive (Elg & Jonnergard, 2010; Blandford et al, 2011; Malik & Courtney, 2011). This has led to a significant component of skill and expertise not being utilised in HE (Rab, 2010).

The exclusion of women in academic leadership positions confirms the assertions of the meritocracy model, organisational discrimination model and the women's place model which argued that biases and discrimination against women are as a result of women not having what is perceived as the right quality to lead an academic department (Meritocracy model), the structures and practices of HE institutions that shut out and frustrate women from assuming leadership positions (Organisational model) and cultural and social norms that socialize men and women into what are defined as gender-related roles of which leadership is not seen as part of a woman's

role (woman's place model) (Grove, 2013; Jarboe, 2013; Morley, 2013; Growe and Montgomery, 1999). As a result of failure to accommodate more women in leadership positions, HE institutions are viewed as patriarchal in nature and hence quite unfriendly and unaccommodating to women (Mishra, 2013).

It was also noted in the study that where a faculties or departments were led by a woman, such departments or faculties tended to be humanities and arts. There was very little representation of women in the science, engineering and medicine faculties in the selected universities.

Conclusions

From the above results, it can be concluded that universities in southern Africa still lag behind the global figures in their promotion of women into leadership positions. The culture of HE institutions of favouring men at the expense of women does not seem to have changed. Women seem to still be frustrated by organisational structures and practices that either prevent them or slow them down when attempting to gain entry into leadership positions. It is further concluded that HE institutions continue to be patriarchal up to this date.

Recommendations

A number of recommendations can be proposed to ensure more women are absorbed into leadership positions in universities globally and in Southern Africa in particular. The recommendations include the following:

First and foremost, to achieve gender parity in academic leadership positions, top management and academics in universities need to acknowledge that a problem (gender gap) exists and then show sustained leadership commitment and accountability to support women advancement in academic leadership positions. They can use a number of mechanisms and strategies to move away from the way things were done in the past by initiating the following strategies:

- Integrating gender issues into coursework: This includes developing more case studies that feature women managers and leaders and portray them as positive role models across the

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curriculum so as to be able to sensitise everybody especially women themselves that women can be able or even become better managers in HE.

• HE institutions need to nurture the pipeline for female faculty:Expanding the pool of female doctorates—especially in fields where women are scarce, such as finance, economics, science and engineering, and strategy can help to develop a pool of competent future academic leaders.

• HE can hire more women as full-time faculty and offer them more support throughout their careers so that women on the tenure track, for example, would benefit from guidance on how to acquire research funding, spend their pre-tenure time most productively, and evaluate the benefits of different types of institutional services, especially leadership services to their careers. Having a deliberate policy of that for every advertised post, women are shortlisted will also help ensure more women are recruited into HE institutions and with more women available in academic departments, chances of more women numbers gaining entry into leadership positions will also rise.

• Using a quota system to encourage the appointment of more women into academic leadership positions.

• Mentoring: Providing ongoing feedback and advice to women academics on career progression and their personal development in the academic field.

• Monitoring of policy enforcement: Top government officials as well as top management in universities need to deliberately set up mechanisms such as annual or semester-wise reports on the implementation of gender parity policies in the institutions.

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